

PRESS RELEASE**February 3, 2006**

Albanian Citizens Voice Opinion on Local Government Performance in National Survey

Cities seen as delivering services but their responsiveness and accountability leave room for improvement.

Tirana, ALBANIA—In Albania's first national survey on local governance, citizens opined on how well cities are performing functions the law assigns to them and on the responsiveness and trustworthiness of city authorities. Auron Pasha, of the Institute for Development Research and Alternatives (IDRA), the organization which ran the survey, announced the results at a press conference today. Barry Reed, Director of USAID's Local Government and Decentralization in Albania (LGDA) project, which sponsored the survey, and Fatos Hodaj, of the Association of Albanian Municipalities (AAM), answered questions following the presentation.

In terms of responsiveness of city government, the survey shows that there is much room for improvement. Only one fourth (25%) of those surveyed thought their city responded to what citizens want. Roughly a third (30-36%) thought their city makes budget decisions that reflect citizen priorities; is interested in what people think; fairly applies taxes and fees; and welcomes citizen participation in decision. Citizens who have interacted with local authorities are more positive. Three-fourths (75%) of those who visited a local government office in the past 12 months reported satisfaction with the exchange. As for trustworthiness, most (70%) citizens believe corruption is common among local officials, with 63% believing city officials act unfairly in awarding contracts. Yet citizens identify economic concerns (like employment), followed by infrastructure and environmental issues as the most important problems facing their city; only six percent named corruption as the main city challenge. In terms of service provision, most citizens understand which services their cities are responsible for providing and report satisfaction with services which are or should be provided by city government. Most (74%) rated downtown roads as "good" or "very good", for example, while 65% said they "usually" or "always" had sufficient water. Citizens were less satisfied with city cleanliness, however.

This survey is based on a nationally representative sample of 1,106 Albanians over 18 who reside in cities. The survey was also conducted in nine cities (Elbasan, Erseka, Kavaja, Kucova, Patos, Pogradec, Rreshen, Saranda, and Shkoder). The margin of error is +/-3%. Complete results are available from the contact information listed below. This is a baseline; a second survey will be carried out in 2007 to track changes. Following the event, LGDA will hold a discussion on the results, attended by central and local officials, donors, and other stakeholders.

###

The findings in this survey represent the responses of the citizens of Albania. They in no way reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.